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FM AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0458
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0433
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000725

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/18/2009
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [KPAO](#) [MZ](#)
SUBJECT: OCTOBER ELECTIONS AND THE SHRINKING DEMOCRATIC
SPACE

REF: MAPUTO 656

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Matthew Roth, Reasons 1.4(b+d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: There are indications that the GRM is using all means available, legal and surreptitious, to ensure a successful Frelimo outcome in the October 28 national elections. Multiple sources suggest that the GRM may be tampering with voter registration, using government resources for campaigning, muzzling the media, choosing an election date that favors the party, stacking the judicial body that reviews elections complaints, and perhaps even pitting opposition parties against each other. Though these actions may lead to questions about the degree to which the election is free and fair, Frelimo's dominance of the political space makes it likely that it would prevail in any scenario. However, these actions represent the broader trend of a weakening democratic space in Mozambique. END SUMMARY.

Voter Registration Manipulation?

12. (C) The GRM has announced that Mozambique's presidential, parliament, and provincial elections will take place on October 28. Voter registration began across the country on June 15. Initial accounts indicate that the process is moving slowly, and fewer numbers have registered than expected. The National Elections Authority (CNE) has announced that it has a \$7 million shortfall, and has had to cut shipments of documents to some rural areas and reduce some civic education campaigns. A Frelimo party insider confided to the Charge how he believes the party will hinder registration of opposition voters--in areas where Renamo and Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM) support is perceived to be strong: registration sites will be deprived of forms and electricity, creating obstacles to registration. He also indicated that civic education teams would only be sent to Frelimo strongholds, ensuring higher rates of registration in those areas. He urged the USG to observe registration closely, noting that he felt that the election would be manipulated most during this process. (Note: Despite repeated requests from multiple Embassies and international organizations over the past eight months, the GRM did not issue an invitation to the diplomatic community to observe the elections process until June 18--after registration had begun, complicating efforts to monitor that process in particular. End note.)

Frelimo Campaigning and Government Resources

13. (C) President Guebuza continues his 'Open Presidency' initiative, in which he visits each province in the country accompanied by Cabinet Ministers one time per year, and

reviews progress of GRM initiatives with local communities in town hall style meetings. These visits require significant amounts of resources, including six leased helicopters, one airplane, and 30-40 vehicles. Though campaigning cannot officially begin until September, these Presidential visits have increasingly taken on the tone of election campaigning over the past few months, with the work of government relegated to a minimal role. Frelimo use of government resources is not limited to just the Presidency; prior to Frelimo's national convention, the Foreign Ministry called international missions and urged them to send representatives to the convention. This was not replicated for opposition party conventions.

An Increasingly Docile Media Sector

14. (C) Government-owned and controlled media outlets have traditionally shown bias towards Frelimo. More worrisome, however, is the trend by ostensibly independent media to succumb to government pressure to reduce criticism of the GRM. One of only two truly independent weekly newspapers--Zambeze--has been dogged by GRM threats to be shut down for various legal problems, and a recent change of the newspaper's board of directors leaves it with a number of new members more closely associated with the Frelimo party. A resident American journalist who offers media training in-country recently explained to P/E chief that a corporation owned by President Guebuza has purchased a significant number of shares in Mozambique's most prominent independent television and daily newspaper conglomerate--STV/Soico.

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Opposition political figures reported the same. We have indeed noted that the editorial line at STV/Soico has softened towards the GRM and Frelimo in recent weeks.

October 28: Conveniently Inconvenient Election Date

15. (C) Local commentators observe that the October 28 date is inconvenient on three levels. It will take place during Ramadan, inconveniencing Muslims. Since the rainy season starts in October, transit to and from polling sites will be more difficult than during the dry season--especially in rural areas. (Note: Muslim and rural communities have traditionally been more likely to vote for Renamo and other opposition parties than for Frelimo. End note.) Finally, the date deprives political parties of three extra weeks to prepare, compared to last year's local elections held in November. The Frelimo insider indicated to the Charge that in opposition strongholds, Frelimo had previously moved voting stations from the place where voters had registered to an unannounced new location, thereby confusing opposition voters. In addition, a European diplomat recently related to P/E chief that he believed that CNE was receiving technical training and advice from a Chinese entity on how to operate the GRM's vote counting software.

New Judiciary Appointments with Close Frelimo Ties

16. (C) In late April and early May, President Guebuza replaced the heads of the Supreme Court, Administrative Court, and the Constitutional Council. The Constitutional Council is the judicial body that reviews appeals and complaints related to elections processes. The three outgoing heads had been appointed by former president Joaquim Chissano. All three incoming appointees are considered to be close to the Frelimo party and have strong ties to President Guebuza. Contacts indicate that, in particular, the new head of the Constitutional Council, Luis Mondlane, is very loyal to Frelimo.

Plotting to divide the Opposition?

17. (C) The recent attack on MDM leader Daviz Simango generated multiple theories about who was the ultimate mastermind (reftel). One theory circulating in Maputo is that the attack by supposed Renamo supporters could have been directed by Frelimo elements. One Frelimo maverick suggested that Frelimo is considering a scenario where it might not reach an absolute majority in the Assembly, thus requiring a coalition partner. By pitting Renamo and MDM against each other, Frelimo reduces the likelihood that the two opposition parties would join together in a coalition, and makes it easier for Frelimo to choose one of them as a partner.

COMMENT: Stemming the Erosion of Democratic Space

18. (C) Though likely that Frelimo would garner the largest number of votes even if the elections were completely free and fair, Frelimo is certainly stacking the deck in its favor with these shenanigans. While premature to suggest that the electoral outcome will not generally reflect the will of the Mozambican people, the changing nature of the opposition, i.e. the rise of MDM and Daviz Simango, and perhaps a perceived lack of genuine popular enthusiasm for Guebuza's second term, have Frelimo nervous and party operatives are doing all they can to guarantee their desired outcome. Frelimo's election actions are indicative of a worrisome trend: a shrinking democratic space in Mozambique. Embassy Maputo is investing its minimal Democracy and Governance funds into domestic electoral observation efforts and events to promote genuine political debate on the issues. A USAID-sponsored Democracy Assessment report which highlighted many concerns about electoral procedures was shared privately with a senior GRM minister, who took great offense, and with other donors who share our concerns. As the electoral campaign heats up, coordinated action with European allies to present concerns to the GRM will be an important check to help preserve the shrinking political space available for the opposition.

CHAPMAN